

DRAFT MINUTES
Of the September 18, 2008
Woods Bay-Bigfork Working Group
Held at 8:30 a.m. at the Saddlehorn Discovery Tower
In Bigfork, Montana

Present Members:

George Darrow, Kevin Gownley, Steve Brady (USFS), Greg Poncin (DNRC), Jim Frizzell, Dan Vincent, Clarice Ryan, Donna Lawson, Anne Moran (DNRC). Also present was Katrin Frye (Flathead Beacon).

Absent Members: Dave Landstrom, Paul Rana, Kitty Rich

The meeting began with a review of the August 21 minutes. George Darrow opened discussion for clarification of paragraph 4 of these minutes where Greg outlined his role as the decision-maker for the agency, stating that he (George) felt the committee provided 3-part representation of three official entities: Dept. of Natural Resources (DNRC), US Forest Service and the public, with possible inclusion as needed of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Motion was made by Donna and seconded that minutes be approved with added consideration of George Darrow's request for the three-part representation.

Three new members have joined the group, two of whom were present and introduced themselves. Steve Brady, the District Ranger for the Swan Lake Ranger District and Dan Vincent, local citizen. Dan clarified that as he is retired from FWP, he does not represent that agency and is participating specifically as a community member. (Dave Landstrom, the official representative of Montana FWP, was unable to attend.)

Further general discussion followed concerning sections of the minutes pertaining to the original request by Chancellor Gilmore, Mt. School of Mines to sell the 440 acres of school trust lands to achieve revenue for that institution. Greg Poncin then again reviewed the origins and purpose of the state land trust and role of the Land Board which requires that the best long term revenue producing use of the land be assured as required by DNRC. Poncin indicated that DNRC is seeking additional ideas and alternatives which would meet the revenue making criteria established by the Agency as well as meeting the interests of the community and others involved. He indicated that DNRC has placed a moratorium on the decision concerning the 440 acres of DNRC land near Woods Bay until alternatives can be addressed and an agreement reached. No time limits have been established at this time, but moving forward is important.

Regarding appointment of officers, George Darrow indicated that Edd Blakler and he had both been appointed as co-chairs for the newly formed Working Group. Edd has since declined, leaving George as the sole candidate. Donna moved, seconded by Dan, that George be appointed as chair. Motion carried unanimously. Steve Brady questioned if the group thought he should be a voting member. It was decided that in addition to DNRC and the community, the USFS and FWP were representing segments the community had perceived as stakeholders.

Anne pointed out that she had previously indicated she could not take on an ongoing responsibility for minutes and still participate effectively. In the absence of a recording secretary, discussion occurred on rotating that responsibility. Clarice agreed to take them for today's meeting and Donna offered to be responsible for the next meeting if we could not find a volunteer in the interim. Anne agreed to continue posting and circulating the minutes once they are done.

Input was provided as follows by each committee member on the topic of: "What Does Success Look Like to Each of Us?"

Kevin:

- Not good for timber management
- Must meet DNRC requirements
- Good management of land in the interests of people and animals living there
- Provide for forest health
- Provide a living class room (geological features, biology classes, compliment adjacent natural areas, preserve the unique features of the land)
- Not good area for a subdivision, no trophy homes
- Need to consider what revenue could be derived

Steve:

- USFS wants to preserve public access (DNRC land bordered on 2 sides by FS)
- Need access for timber management
- FS does NOT care to own it due to close proximity to populated areas and fire protection needed. (WUI) We do not want more land adjoining private property as the urban interface adds to the responsibility..
- This location does not lend itself to management as true wildlands which limits or restricts human access as is needed for research. Management by Mother Nature, leaving fires burn by natural process. Not active management in study areas.
- Would like to see it stay publicly accessible, more in wildland state rather than subdivided.
- Wants to add options.

Jim:

- Fire protection and fire fighting could be a problem
- The area needs timber management with fuels reduction
- Controlled public access in a responsible manner is desirable
- Excellent wildlife corridor. Excellent variety and abundance of wildlife
- Excellent education opportunity for schools and public (classes and field trips)

Dan:

- All of above while providing reasonable revenue for school trust (perhaps not to the extent of "highest" return) and managing for wildlife, recreation, and water quality.
- If we are successful, our approach might set a precedent for handling land-locked trust lands elsewhere

- does not want to set a precedent that every time land is not producing, it becomes the responsibility of citizens in the area.
- We need to weed the garden. It could be income producing while cleaning up.

Donna:

- We hope to reach cohesive agreement satisfactory to the School of Mines Chancellor
- do this in a timely manner.

Clarice:

- Proper management could provide all of the desired functions
- Forests are capable of financing their own care and management, perhaps with additional revenues.
- Carefully planned selective timber removal would enhance all of the above uses while protecting forest health and safety from destructive fires.
- DNRC has a history of successful forest management while providing school funding

George:

- We could combine Federal and State lands under a unified purpose
- This can be done while not harvesting timber. People should not be making a living off of state lands.
- Tourism, recreation, education with guides could be an alternative for long-term use
- Discussed limitations on ATVs and plans and management for dealing with the impacts of various kinds of land use.
- If USFS could acquire land by exchange, that would be good.

Greg (DNRC)

- All above were well stated
- There are 3 tiers of achieving desired results:
 - Immediate: Fiduciary obligation to the trust plus land management for meeting all other responsibilities
 - Intermediate: Addressing issues such as motorized vs. non-motorized, closed roads, environmental, etc.
 - Long Term: No subdivisions while at the same time meeting revenue production requirements. Pressures in this regard are great now and are increasing. Regarding the issue of development: if the community desires to preclude development the group should explore options to protect this parcel, e.g.:
- Considerations to be addressed:
 - Conservation Easements
 - Selling development rights
 - Designating as a natural area and attendant lease
 - Unwritten responsibility to public desires (recreation, fire protection, access)
- First Priority: Revenue production. Are we getting full market value for the lands?
 - What are acceptable levels? (A 1999 report by an appraiser is available showing its value at highest and best use)

Discussion followed: We need to set goals to aim at, leaving it open to explore alternatives. We need full price for the options – not necessarily “highest and best” use. Steve indicated we need an estimate on what this land is expected to produce over a period of time – not just value of developmental rights.

Greg: DNRC has a complete real estate plan available showing goals with positions to take advantage of growth those communities are experiencing. Land pressures change over time. It is a long term issue. Some development is conducive to preserving it. It is a long-term issue.

Anne: We constantly re-evaluate land and its use and return. The various real estate transaction tools (selling development rights, easements, etc.) could be employed to insure permanence for the community’s desires for the property. Anne agreed to get copies of the transaction tools to the group members to review before the next meeting.

Jim made a 2-part motion (see Working Group Recommendations, below).

- Motion to agree on what “Success” should look like.
- Motion to, at the next meeting, identify the approaches to achieve success, using this committee to pursue them. Donna seconded followed by unanimous committee vote.

(Also, various names were offered for the group’s title, but so much discussion occurred simultaneously we didn’t capture an agreed-upon decision on this, so hopefully we can revisit it briefly at the next meeting.)

NEXT MEETING DATE: Thursday, October 2, 2008 8:30-10:00 a.m., Saddlehorn
Assignment: Come prepared to discuss alternative approaches

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

as developed at
September 18 Meeting

1. What Does Success Look Like?

DNRC fiduciary responsibilities (seek support)

Management of land

- Timber (fuel-reduction), income generation
- Weeds
- Public access (recreation, education, controls)
- Coexisting with contiguous lands: align with natural areas

Wildlife protection/water quality

Education (guided, living classrooms)

No subdivisions

Be timely

- Immediate
- Intermediate
(motorized use)
- Long-Term
Revenue production
Cost of conservation easements

2. Identify Approaches

DNRC maintain ownership/stewardship

lot revenue production

conservation easements

+/- development rights

short-term revenue product

DNRC trade to USFS